

HABS
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Bank of Lafayette (Old City Hall)
217 West Main Street
Lafayette
Lafayette Parish
Louisiana

HABS No. LA-1154

P H O T O G R A P H S

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20240

AMERICA'S CITY HALLS

NAME: Bank of Lafayette
Old City Hall

LOCATION: 217 West Main Street
Lafayette, Lafayette, Louisiana

PRESENT OWNER, PRESENT OCCUPANT, PRESENT USE:

City of Lafayette
Presently unoccupied, the building is
undergoing renovation for use as offices.

SIGNIFICANCE: Originally constructed in 1898 as the Bank of Lafayette,
it was sold to the City of Lafayette in 1906 for use as a
City Hall and became the first structure in the City to
be placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

The Old City Hall (La Vielle Maire) of Lafayette at 217 West Main Street is across the street from the Lafayette Parish Court House, the fourth court house on the site of the 12 lots donated by Jean Mouton for use as a court house. The lots on the old plat of the Old Corporation are lots 43 and 52 with the buildings on the south side of Main Street and lots 71, 72, 79, 80, 87, 88, 95, 96, and 103. Mouton, founder of Lafayette, was the father of Gov. Alexandre Mouton, Louisiana's first Democratic governor, who also served as president of the secession convention of Louisiana. Lafayette was chartered under the name of Vermilionville in 1824. Mouton executed a deed conveying the 12 lots to the Parish of Lafayette on September 20, 1824.

The Old City Hall, a landmark building in Lafayette and the first structure in the city to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places, is owned by the City of Lafayette. It is presently unoccupied and is undergoing restoration, which is scheduled to be completed by mid September. It will then be occupied by the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL), an agency dedicated to the preservation of the French and Acadian heritage of the area. The restoration project is estimated to cost \$210,000.00

The building is historically significant not only because it was the city's first city hall but also because of the prominent figures who were involved in the development of Lafayette through activities carried on in the building. It also serves as an example of early commercial architecture in Lafayette.

The building was planned and personally supervised during its construction in 1898 to house the Bank of Lafayette by one of the town's earliest architects, George Knapp. Knapp, a humpbacked man, came to Lafayette in 1887 from Evansville, Ind. He married a local girl in 1892 and remained here until his death in 1949. Knapp personally inspected the construction of all his buildings. He was a self-taught architect who learned his profession through correspondence courses from the International Correspondence School and through personal experience. Knapp also

planned the Masonic Temple, the Old Post Office, the Gordon Hotel, the Mt. Carmel Convent, the original Jefferson Theatre and other landmark buildings in the Central Business District as well as many houses here and in New Iberia extant today. Knapp was later selected as the city's building inspector and served well in that capacity also.

A. J. Moss and Emile Mouton Lumber Co. supplied lumber and hardware for the building. Gaston Landry was the painter. Bricks used in the building were made at the nearby Paxton Brick Company. The brick yard was originally established by three brothers: Richard, Hubert and Sebastian Chargois, brickmakers from London, England, who came to Lafayette and established the brick yard on the east side of St. John Street between Covent Street and what is now University Avenue. They sold the brick company to Samuel Paxton on March 7, 1837. Richard Chargois laid the bricks for the building with bricks made from materials dug at the brick yard. That excavation filled up with water in later years (when the brick yard was shut down) and was used as the "Ole Swimming Hole". It was ordered filled when two young cousins of prominent families were drowned there.

The Bank of Lafayette opened its doors in the newly constructed building on June 2, 1898 with a capital stock of \$250,000 divided into 250 share of \$100 each. Its officers were: Crow Girard, president; William Clegg, vice president; J. J. Davidson, cashier. Its Board of Directors were: P. B. Roy, E. G. Voorhies, Jules J. Mouton, A. Judice, William Clegg, F. H. Gregory, Gus LaCoste, William Campbell and Crow Girard. These men were business leaders who represented the moneyed and agricultural interests of the town. Girard and his family gave the 25 acres to assure that a proposed educational institution would be established in Lafayette. Today the University of Southwestern Louisiana, whose main campus is on the 25 acres, has seven colleges, a graduate school and a University College for night and special classes. Its enrollment is over 14,000, including a large international student body.

With the rapid growth of the bank, its stock was increased on June 6, 1904 to \$50,000, 500 shares of \$100 each. The continuing growth of the bank, coupled with the continuing growth of the town made it necessary for the bank to seek larger quarters. In 1905 the bank moved to the building on the corner of Congress and Jefferson Streets, which is now known as the Old Guaranty Bank Building.

At about this same time it became necessary, because of the growth of the town, for full time to be devoted to matters of government and for a city hall to be acquired. City officials had been meeting in the court house.

Vermilionville was incorporated by legislative act on March 11, 1836 at which time the boundaries of the Village of Vermilionville were fixed and by terms of the charter was to be governed by five councilmen. It was re-incorporated in 1869, its boundaries extended and a new government established with a mayor and seven councilmen. In 1884 its charter was amended to change the name to Lafayette.

In the meantime, by a resolution unanimously adopted by the Board of the Bank of Lafayette, on June 17, 1906, its vice president, Crow Girard, was authorized to sell the bank's building on Main Street for \$4,500.00. Earlier, on June 12, 1906 the Lafayette City Council had passed a resolution authorizing Dr. A. R. Trahan, mayor pro tem, to accept the sale of the Bank of Lafayette's building, the Old Bank of Lafayette building, for \$4,500.00. Charles Mouton was mayor at the time. The city acquired the building for its first city hall on June 29, 1906 by Act 33947, as recorded in the Clerk of Court's office. Act 237263 relating to the property is an Act of Rectification of lines and boundaries, dated Jan. 20, 1950.

In 1908 a prison was built back of the city hall with three cells for whites and three cells for blacks. Jailer Aboina Herish was paid 75 cents per day per prisoner to feed the prisoners. The jail was demolished about 1959. Its foundation remains. The gates to the cells were sold to P. J. Voorhies and stored at the Lafayette Lumber Co. They were later sold to the Town of Scott. Their present whereabouts are unknown.

Because of the continuing growth of the city and the need for change, a committee was selected in 1912 composed of Dr. A. R. Trahan, then mayor, and three council members to make a study followed by recommendations. Their recommendations were to install the trustee form of government; appoint a chief of police by the Trustee of Public Safety (or mayor); establish a paid municipal fire department; establish a civil service for municipal employees and authorize the city to have sole jurisdiction over all primary schools in the city. Following authorization by the Legislature, the recommendations were accepted by vote of the citizens.

The Old City Hall served as such until 1939, when Works Progress Administration funds became available for the construction of a new city hall. During the transition period from 1933-1942, the lower floor of the Old City Hall was used by a local women's organization, Les Vingt Quatre (The 24) to house the library. From 1942, when the club turned over the library to the city to operate, what was then called the Lafayette Municipal Library continued to be housed on the lower floor of the building until 1953. From 1953 until late 1972 the Planning Commission was housed on the top floor. The Lafayette Municipal Civil Service Commission, which was created in that building, was housed on the lower floor from 1959-1963. Other agencies also housed in the Old City Hall at various times were the Civil Defense Radio Station and the office of the Boy Scouts of America.

It is interesting to note also that four members of one family worked in the building in various capacities. Mabel Boulet served as secretary to the Boy Scouts; her brother Abdon, served as janitor for the building for about four years; and her brother, M. L. Boulet, now an associate of Architect and Associates in charge of the restoration project. Boulet's son, Brent, served as a carpenter for the Commercial Construction Co., general contractors for the project.

When the building, needing repairs, was no longer in use, plans were begun during the administration of Mayor Kenneth Bowen, to seek funds for its restoration. The project, now funded, is continuing under the administration of Mayor Dudley Lastrapes with completion scheduled for mid September, when it will then be occupied by the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL).

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

The two-story brick edifice of a modified rococo design is the type of commercial building erected in small towns of the South at the turn of the century. The building was constructed on a portion of lot 42 of the old plat of the Old Corporation. The front and east side of the structure were built on the property lines. The west side has a three-foot alley separating the building from its neighbor. There is at the rear a 31-foot back yard, where in 1908 the prison cells were erected. Demolished in 1959, the foundation remains and is to be incorporated in the courtyard to be provided during the restoration.

The building is 25 feet wide and 40 feet deep and was erected on a brick chain wall with continuous footing underneath. It has 12-inch load - bearing exterior walls. The flat roof pitched from the front to the back has brick parapets on the front and

two sides. Because roof water poured over the rear wall, it was plastered in 1947 for waterproofing purposes. The exterior brick walls are tied every eighth course (called a bond course) for wall reinforcement.

The first floor facade has two large double hung windows with wood sash and open entrance. The windows have semi-elliptical-shaped colored glass transoms. Brick arches above these windows and above the open entrance contain lighter colored brick dentils. These details are also between the windows and at the corners of the building. The window sills are plastered over brick.

A notable feature of the building on the second floor facade is the semicircular balcony with wood turned balusters and a semi-circular arch above. The roof of the balcony is of zinc in the shape of a peculiar inverted funnel. There is a double hung window with wood sash on each side of the balcony with plaster over brick sills and a semi-elliptical brick arch at the top. Over each window is an ornamental design of the same lighter colored brick as the dentils. Centered at the top of the building, higher than the regular parapet wall, is a brick semi-circular section of the parapet wall with brick dentils.

Bricks used on the facade are a larger type than on the sides of the building. Every brick joint on the east and west sides of the building and some on the front had to be cut out and repointed with a matching type mortar during the restoration work. Two bricks on the west wall are stamped. The impression is of a silver dollar, dated 1880, the year the first train reached Lafayette. Mortar joints on the facade brick are much thinner than the mortar joints on the sides of the building.

The open entry on the first floor has a ceramic tile floor and a sturdy cast iron threshold. There are two doors in this open entry. One opens into the first floor. The other opens onto the stairs leading to the second floor. The stairs are of wood construction with a 3/4 - inch wood beaded pine side wall and ceiling. For the restoration work special knives had to be hand filed to match the existing beaded work.

The first and second floors are constructed with wood floor joints, which span from the 12-inch exterior brick walls to interior bearing partitions. The stairs lead to a large room at the rear of the building. It opens into the two smaller front rooms. At one time there were three-foot high wrought iron hand rails marking the entrance to the doors that open onto the semi-circular balcony. The ceilings of the rooms are tongue and groove pine.

Robert E. Smith, architectural restoration consultant, surmises that over the years walls have been added to divide the interior. These are the first floor walls paralleling the street and all dividing or interior walls upstairs and the enclosure of the stairs at the second story level. These walls contain doors and enframements which do not match those of the exterior walls and appear to be of a later vintage. Smith believes this took place in 1906, when the building changed ownership. The interior walls were originally covered by wall paper on canvas on vertical sheathing.

During the restoration work the foundation of the bank's vaults were located. They will be in the area planned as the conference room for CODOFIL. The only interior additions made during the current restoration was the addition of a five-foot square area on the first and second floors to serve as a "rest room-mechanical core." The building is being centrally heated and cooled. Wiring in front of the building is being placed so as to service the building underground. A brick walk in the front of the building and in the alleyway is also planned.

PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Architectural drawings, blueprints courtesy of Architect and Associates, Inc.
Photographs by Leroy Langlois.

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Dismukes, J. Phillip. The Center: A History of the Development of Lafayette, Louisiana.

Mrs. J. Cas (Louise) Chargois - Personal Interview

Robert E. Smith, Architectural Restoration Consultant. Report made to City of Lafayette on Old City Hall dated Dec. 23, 1976.

M. L. Boulet - Personal Interview

Broussard, Alton. "Original City Hall Will Be Restored." Daily Advertiser, Nov. 12, 1978, p. 81.

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City of Lafayette
August 28, 1981

ADDENDUM TO:
BANK OF LAFAYETTE
(Old City Hall)
217 West Main Street
Lafayette
Lafayette Parish
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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

FIELD RECORDS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

BANK OF LAFAYETTE

(Old City Hall)

(Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL))

HABS No. LA-1154

Location: 217 West Main Street, Lafayette, Lafayette Parish, Louisiana

Significance: The building was originally constructed in 1898 as the Bank of Lafayette, and in 1906 it was sold to the City of Lafayette for use as the town's first City Hall. It is also significant for being the first structure in Lafayette to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places on June 10, 1975.

Description: The two-story brick structure was built in the style of a modified Moorish Revival design which was typical of commercial buildings erected in small towns of the South at the turn of the century. The front and east faces of the building were constructed on the property lines. The west side has a three foot alley separating the building from its neighbor. At the rear, there is a 31 foot back yard, where in 1908 the prison cells were erected and demolished in 1959. The dimensions of the building are 25 feet wide and 40 feet deep; and it was constructed on a brick chain wall with a continuous footing supporting 12-inch exterior load bearing brick walls. The roof has a slight pitch from front to back with a brick parapet on the front and two sides. The parapet has a higher semi-circular projection at the center of the main façade. The rear wall was plastered in 1947 for waterproofing purposes because of rain runoff from the roof. To reinforce the exterior walls, the bricks are tied every eighth course which is called a bond course.

The Bank of Lafayette has large double hung wood sash windows with plaster over brick sills. The windows have elliptical arch transoms with a brick relieving arch accented with tan brick dentils. The semicircular balcony on the second floor with wood turned balusters and a semi-circular arch above is a significant feature of the building. The inverted funnel-shaped hood above the balcony is made of zinc.

The open entry porch on the first floor has ceramic tile flooring and a cast iron threshold. There are two doors in this open entry; one opens into the first floor and the other reveals the stairs leading to the second floor. At the top of the stairs, in the back of the building, a large room opens into two smaller front rooms. The ceilings of the rooms are tongue and groove pine and the interior walls were originally covered by wall paper on a canvas vertical sheathing. In 1906, when the building changed ownership, interior partition walls parallel to the street were added to divide the upstairs.

History: George Knapp, one of the town's earliest architects, came to Lafayette in 1887 from Evansville, Indiana. He designed and supervised the construction of the Bank of Lafayette in 1898. He was a self taught architect who learned his profession through correspondence courses from the International Correspondence School and through personal experience. On June 2, 1898, the Bank of Lafayette opened its doors and the officers of the bank were: Crow Girard - president, William Clegg - vice president, and J. J. Davidson - cashier. The Board of Directors was: P.B. Roy, E. G. Voorhies, Jules J. Mouton, A. Judice, William Clegg, F. H. Gregory, Gus LaCoste William Cambell, and Crow Girard. As the bank continued to grow along with the town, a larger building became necessary.

In 1905 the bank moved to the building on the corner of Congress and Jefferson Street, which is now known as the Old Guaranty Bank Building. The city of Lafayette purchased the building for its first city hall on June 29 1906 at a cost of \$4,500. In 1908, a prison was added to the back of the city hall with three cells for whites and three cells for blacks. The jail was later demolished around 1959.

In 1939, Works Progress Administration funds became available for the construction of a new larger city hall. During the transition period from 1933-1942, the first floor of the Old City Hall building was used by a local women's organization, Les Vingt Quatre (The 24) to house the library. The city housed the Lafayette Municipal Library on the first floor from 1942 until 1953. The second floor was used for the city's planning commission from 1953-1972. The Lafayette Municipal Civil Service Commission was created in the building and was located on the first floor from 1959-1963. The Civil Defense Radio Station and the office of the Boy Scouts of America were also housed in the Old City Hall at various times.

Sources: Bank of Lafayette (Old City Hall) HABS Documentation. accessed online 14 October 2010
<<http://memory.loc.gov/pnp/habshaer/la/la0100/la0177/data/la0177.pdf>>.

Historian: Robbie Kemp and Paula Fontenot, 2010-2011.